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INFORMATION

December 31, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR:

HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM:

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

TOM LATIMER

SUBJECT:

Hanoi's Intentions During the Dry Season

NSA Review Completed

A pattern of troop deployment is occurring on the part of the Vietnamese communists reminiscent of certain campaigns against the French in the 1950's. Since early October 1971, an estimated 56,000 North Vietnamese troops have been put into the infiltration pipeline. Of that total, some 17,000 are destined for base areas in the central highlands and another 23,000 are moving toward Cambodia or the southern area of South Vietnam. In addition, there is good evidence that the communists are preparing to launch major attacks in the northernmost provinces of South Vietnam, probably by mid-February. Communications involving the North Vietnamese 308th Division which is still inside North Vietnam, indicate that it may be about to deploy into the northernmost province of South Vietnam, Quang Tri. Intercepted communications also suggest that the North Vietnamese 320th and 324B Divisions are also about to deploy from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. The 324B Division may be going to MR Tri-Thien-Hue in the northern two provinces while the 320th may be headed further south to the B-3 Front area in the central highlands.

We have already seen the kick-off of the North Vietnamese dry season campaign in the Plaine des Jarres and their effort to drive Laotian forces off the Bolovens. They may even intend to threaten the Mekong River town of Pakse.

-- In Cambodia, although communist initiated action has slackened off lately, there are signs that they may initiate additional attacks in the Tonle Tch region soon.

Waging simultaneous campaigns in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam is an old Viet Minh tactic. In 1954, prior to the Dien Bien Phu battle, Vo Nguyen Giap sent his forces into Laos and down into Cambodia both to draw French attention and troops away from the major battlefield in Vietnam and also to

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strengthen the party's hand in both those countries. Earlier, in 1951, Giap stood and fought against the French at Hoa Binh while his guerrillas slipped behind French lines and gained control over large areas of the Red River delta. Finally, there was the 1968 battle at Khe Sanh which tied down a large number of U. S. Marines while the Tet offensive was mounted against urban centers throughout South Vietnam.

In short, we may be seeing the preparations for yet another multi-pronged Vietnamese communist military show of strength. If that is the case, we can expect further attacks in northern and southern Laos, more action by the communists in Cambodia and renewed offensive activity in South Vietnam, particularly in the central highlands and northern Military Region I.

The timing for such offensives is anybody's guess. My own is that Hanoi will try to stage an impressive display of military power prior to the President's trip to Peking.

- They probably do not count on toppling the Laotian or Cambodian Governments with this upcoming offensive, let alone the Saigon government but they may well believe that they can demonstrate to the Chinese that they are in a "winning position" and are justified in holding out for maximum terms for a negotiated end to the war.
- They may also hope that a maximum possible result of the offensive would be to whip up American public pressure on President Nixon to settle the war on Hanoi's terms.

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